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ABSTRACT

After reviewing the benefits of the in-class publishing of student writing, this paper describes such a college freshman publication and the process of producing it. The reasons presented in support of publishing student work include the observations that most students have no other opportunity to publish; that the composition classroom should be a workshop where students learn revision, proofreading, and preparing a manuscript for close scrutiny; and that the relative immediacy of such a publication generally intensifies the writing efforts of unpublished students. Described in the process of producing the publication are marketing the project to the students, arranging financing, collecting and selecting manuscripts, organizing the contents, and distributing the complete booklet. (AEA)

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Publishing Student Writing: An In-Class Model

Robert C. Wess

"Publish or perish" has been the academician's battlecry for many years, but seldom has the saying been applied to student writing. Yet, without publication, student writing immediately perishes from neglect. In this essay I intend to voice support for in-class publication of student writing: why such a publication should exist and what it is, how to go about producing it, and the multifaceted values to be gained from it.

I make such a proposal for several sound reasons. First, the vast majority of students in the United States will have no opportunity to publish anything in newspapers, periodicals, or elsewhere. Second, freshman composition, the apprenticeship for college and career writing, should be the workshop where students learn the discipline of revision, the craft of proofreading, and the painful joy of preparing a manuscript for close scrutiny. Third, in teaching several sections of composition, instructors may realistically publish entries from many of their students while still demanding quality work from all students. Fourth, the relative immediacy of such a publication underscores the need for intensified writing efforts from unpublished students. For those published, moreover, the project becomes a theoretical halfway point between not publishing at all and publishing professionally. Weaning students away from writing merely to please the teacher, it creates in them a growing awareness of what makes writing work in larger contexts.

For the past four semesters, I have directed such a publication, a booklet of freshman composition consisting of well-turned

sentences, solid paragraphs, and competent 500-word themes written on such rhetorical types as description, comparison/contrast, and argumentation. The result becomes an anthology of the semester's work projects. But content is not the topic here--my focus is on the method of producing such an essay booklet, the "how-to" aspects for those teachers who want to try their hand at such an enterprise. The following steps explain the process.

Market the Project. The first step in producing an in-class publication is to sell the idea, so to speak. I begin the strategy on the very first day of class, describing my "other" required text--the essay booklet. Displaying the most recently published booklet, I point out its significance, attractiveness, and the quality of its contents. I explain that a similar work will be published at the end of the current semester. Their task, I challenge them, will require hard work in performing the semester's writing assignments so that a piece of their work might be selected for publication. Then I hand out a single page of guidelines for preparing an essay, should one of theirs be chosen. I advise them, moreover, that selection will demand extra work. Revisions, proofreadings, and typing jobs are the usual pre-publication requirements. A carrot I dangle before them, however, is a "Double A" grade on any assignment selected, a significant incentive for today's grade-minded students.

Teachers who attempt such a publication will want to choose

an original title, motto, and cover design either to their own taste or in cooperation with the class. Because I usually teach multiple sections of composition, I myself decided on these details, coming up with a suitable design two years ago and using it ever since. The title I use is Rites of Passage. The motto, scribere est discere ("to write is to learn"), I generated from my knowledge of Latin and from my essential belief that writing fosters thinking. The cover design illustrates a stairway rising diagonally across the cover upon which are superimposed in ascending order the words of the title. The motto graces the upper-left corner while class identifications are posted in the lower right-hand corner.

The final procedure in marketing the booklet is collecting money to pay publication costs. Since the project ought to be self-supporting, instructors should collect costs from the class itself. By computing page quantity and total number of booklets, teachers may easily determine the total cost of paper, covers, and printing. Dividing total cost by the number of copies to be made yields the amount to charge each student. In collecting this money, I designate a student treasurer in each class. Once the money has been collected, I turn it over to a departmental fund covering supplies, freeing us all from having to worry further about the mercantile aspects of the project.

Collect the Manuscripts. Once the preliminary marketing project has been completed, the class focuses on the various writing assignments which comprise the semester's work. From

each of these varied assignments I will pick the best overall essay(s) or the most representative work(s) for inclusion in the booklet. This dual criterion allows the teacher sometimes to choose a less-than-best essay when a) the same student usually turns in the best work, or b) an average student turns in a marred but potentially good essay if significant reworking takes place. In making the final choice, the teacher may be the sole arbiter, the class as a whole may decide, or both students and teacher may make the decision.

After the selection process, I request that each winner see me for a private conference. During this session the writer and I discuss the essay's merits, potential revisions, and any editorial problems. The student then works on a revision to be completed at a mutually agreed-on time. I continue to scrutinize each revision until a final version is accepted. While some teachers prefer to use student-editors, I see this individual editing work as a very important part of my job. Meeting with students on a one-to-one basis allows me to explore their writing more fully and to make specific suggestions for revisions, both of which would prove very difficult for a writer's peer.

Organize the Booklet. As the semester approaches conclusion and all the contributed essays have been collected, it is time to organize and bind them into booklets. I like to keep the essays in chronological order but, to avoid any blank pages, I make changes as necessary. Last semester Rites of Passage contained the following materials: Table of Contents, Prefatory

Letter and Model Essay written by the teacher, Focused Writing (three examples), Comparison and Contrast (6), Description (3), Process (3), Cause and Effect (3), and Cultural Events. This last section included four essays critiquing the play Star-Spangled Girl by Neil Simon and the movie version of All Quiet on the Western Front, both of which had been performed during the semester with required student attendance.

To introduce each of the above sections which followed the prefatory letter and essay, last semester I included section-heading pages, consisting of title and illustration to introduce each type of writing assignment. Each was sketched by student volunteers. One such heading introduced the process essay by displaying a gumball machine complete with instructions and arrows pointing out how to extract a gum ball. Another juxtaposed a sketching of an elephant next to a mouse, a humorous but graphic introduction to Comparison/Contrast. For the movie based on Remarque's novel, an art major taking freshman composition etched a rifle and a bird with a German helmet cleverly interposed between the two.

Pagination and setting up the table of contents are the final preparations before printing. Page numbers are typed at the bottom-center of each page throughout the booklet, with the exception of the Section Heading pages. In completing the Contents' page, sections are announced in bold capital letters at the left-hand margin while individual entries are indented and typed beneath the sections. Entries include title and

by-line.

Now comes the most exciting part--printing and putting together the booklet. At Pembroke State University, I have available a Quik Print press, a fairly professional form of duplication. After running off copies, two student volunteers and I place them into the collating machine. We quickly order the pages; then we add front and back covers. Before stapling them together, however, we make one final page-check to certify that 1) all pages are in correct order, and 2) each page is good copy. The booklet may be bound by hole-punching, wire-threading, or glue-and-press. A simpler binding process, the one I use, is stapling them with an electric stapler after the final page check. And there they are--the finished products. Representing a time span of four months and painstaking efforts by many students, these finished booklets are the crowning glory of the semester's work.

Distribute the Product. Production of the composition booklet culminates in its distribution to students at semester's end during the final exam period. With pride and pleasure, I thank students for their efforts and ask them to sign my booklet before leaving. I usually end up signing theirs as well. As farewells are exchanged, the typically stern and silent exam room becomes transformed into a scene of great camaraderie. The booklet they will carry home becomes their memento of that passage called Freshman Composition.

Each semester, because of the hard work involved, I ask

myself whether I should continue publishing Rites of Passage. At the end of last semester, though, as my student helpers and I were walking to the student lounge for a coke just after putting the booklets together, I was reflecting on this very thought when one of them asked, "Are we going to do the booklet next semester in Comp. II?"

My answer was a tired, "I don't know. We'll see."

She said, "I sure hope so. It makes the class so much more interesting."

My mind, tired though it was at the end of the semester, recorded her enthusiasm. Now, as I start marketing the project once again this semester, I don't suppose I myself could have invented a better reason for continuing the project.